WAS IT A DREAM?

"OH dear!" said a small voice. It came from a little white bedroom, in which were two little white beds. An angel had come down from heaven to give sweet dreams to the children sleeping there. They had been very good, the tiny boy and girl, and now they slept with flushed faces and tossed golden hair on their

downy pillows. And you know, little children, that to those of you who are good, God sends down His angels who take care of the stars, and they give you beautiful dreams. Only one angel comes each night, and on the door of every house into which she may enter, she sees a scarlet seal. Then she flies in through the windows, that open like magic at the touch of her soft wings, and, bending over the sleepers, she whispers low in their ears. But the dreams are chosen by the children themselves. Some dream of plum-puddings, and some of toys, and some of games. And there are just a few children who are God's specially loved ones. These He has only lent to us for a time, and while they are with us they dream always of angels with golden crowns and golden wings and golden harps.

Well, I have told you this that you may understand how the angel came to be there. But I am not going to tell you about the children. She had breathed into the ear of each, and the little boy lay dreaming that he was a soldier with a real gun, while the little girl dreamed of a real dolls' house with real furniture and real pictures, and, above all, real live dolls to live in it.

"Oh dear!" It was not either of the children who sighed like this. The angel could see that quite well. Their little lips were parted to their gentle breathing, and they lay very still. So she looked round the room to find out what else was there, and her eyes fell on a Japanese fan hanging on the wall. This fan was a present from a Japanese girl to the small English boy, who had been born in Japan. As she looked at it the sigh broke forth again, and she saw then that it came from a painted stork that was flying daintily across the fan.

"What makes you so unhappy, little stork?" asked the angel.

"Ah, dear angel," answered the stork, "I am fastened here for ever; and though the sky is always blue, and the almond blossoms are always pink, and I give great joy to all who look at me, still I long once more to see the dear home where I was born, and the wife who was given to me, and the little ones who came after I left, and whom I have never seen!"

Then the angel's wings grew rosy pink, and love shone out of her beautiful eyes from the sympathy that she felt for the little lonely stork. So she took pity on him, and plucked

from her wings one of the soft pink feathers. With this she touched the bird on the feet and on the outspread wings and on the head.

"Fly away, little stork," she said; "but come back before the children wake, or they will miss you and cry for you. So now the stork spread her wings across the room, and gaily gave the promise as he fled away into the bright star-lit night. All the stars twinkled and gleamed brighter than ever, for they saw the pink feather of their sister angel fastened on the bird's head, and they wished to speed him on his joyous flight.

On and on he flew into the Orient, nearer and nearer to the rising sun, on through the rosy clouds that drift over the dawn, till all at once a blaze of light burst from the edge of the sea and morning had come. Then he knew that his home was nearly reached. There in front of him were the long low islands of Japan, with the sacred cone of the Fuji-Yama rising in their midst, and as he drew nearer to them a tremor of delight passed through him and shook all the feathers in his breast, so that they shimmered in the beautiful clear light.

Now his own village is in sight. How pretty it is! The grey-tiled houses nestle

in and out of the hill-side, each with its almond trees and its tiny rockery and garden! The rice-fields wave green in the morning air, and the sweet scent of the almond blossoms is wafted here and there by the fresh spring breezes.

All the villagers are busy. Here is one with a barrow full of tortoises, here is another with a tray full of flowers and plants. One is selling little china cups and saucers, another is hawking metal teapots. Everywhere something is going on, yet no one is in a hurry, and every one is smiling and happy. Merry little girls clad in the richest rainbow hues, with eyes bright as stars, and smooth black hair dressed in butterfly fashion, are flitting to and fro on their wooden clogs. They are like butterflies themselves; so bright and heedless. Matrons in more sober garb, with blackened teeth and yellow skins, are busy drawing water. All is full of life.

Right in the middle of the village stands a detached cottage, and the stork flies straight towards it. It is roofed with grey shingles, and behind it is a tiny garden. It is just such a garden as little Dorothy might have wished for the beautiful dolls' house that Uncle Willie gave her at Christmas; and if she could only

have travelled on the stork's back to the wonderful "Island of the Rising Sun," she might perhaps have found out how to make one. I cannot tell you this. I can only tell you what it is like. It is quite a small strip of ground, just such a corner as your father and mother perhaps have given you out of their big garden to sow your own flowers in; but in it there is everything that there is in your father's big garden. See, here is a little stream with gold fish in it; there is a little wooden bridge across it; here is a dwarf pine-tree, only two feet high, not as high as your baby brother, and spreading out in every direction. It is quite like a big mushroom, is it not? Over in that corner is a summer house. Near the house, in another corner, is a stone lantern and a little well, and several curiously-shaped earthenware pots. Each has a little tree in it—a thick, stumpy piece of wood, yet all covered with blossoms—almonds, plums, and cherries in full flower. Are we in the Island of Lilliput, or have we strayed into Fairyland? Ah, no! but the Japanese are like little children, and they love the flowers dearly. So when they have not room for big trees and flowers, they make baby flowers and baby trees that never grow any bigger, even if they live for fifty years.

Outside this cottage, on the verandah, sat a boy selling fans like those in the children's bedroom in England, and inside it other boys were making similar fans.

The stork passed by all the Japanese workers, and they could not see him, for the pink feather made him invisible to their eyes, and he went into the inner room that is called the guest-room. There, in a corner, hung a fan, and painted on the fan was a mother-stork and all her little ones. Now our traveller knew that he had found the wife and the baby-storks whom he had come to seek.

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For many hours they talked together, but what they talked about I cannot tell you. All day they talked, and the evening came, and the guest-chamber in the little cottage grew dark, and still the little stork was talking.

"I cannot go," he was saying. "Why did the angel tell me to come back? I cannot leave this lovely land again!"

As he spoke, a little girl entered the room. She was only about eight years old, but she was dressed in a long gown, and she had fans and flowers in her dark hair just like the women in the village. She was very pretty indeed, but she looked sad. What could

make so sweet a child unhappy. The moment she saw the little stork she darted across the room and kissed his head. You will wonder how it was she saw him when no one else did, and I will tell you. Those who love anything or any person with their whole heart and soul can see all that is invisible to ordinary people, for love is the great bond that unites together everything in the world, visible and invisible. So when people tell you that love is blind, you will know that this is not true, and you will tell them that love sees everything. The child knew the little stork. Had he not been painted by her big brother for the English boy who was sleeping in the white bedroom in far-away England? And she begged the stork, with trembling lips and eyes dimmed with tears, to tell her of her English friend. Ah! she loved him so dearly. Would he never come back to her?

"Little stork, little stork," she said, when he had finished telling her of the angel who had asked him to come back to the children, "will you not go and tell the little boy how I miss him, and how much I want him? Then you can come to-morrow night, and bring him on your back, and neither you nor he need ever return; but you will live here always, and we shall be so happy together."

But it was very hard for the little stork. Must he fly back again to the fog and the cold? And again he sighed. Yet the child looked at him so piteously and her smile was so winsome that the stork could not bear to refuse her.

So, with a heavy heart, he took leave of the beautiful Japan, and sallied forth again. It was night still as he crossed over land and sea; but there were no stars to cheer him with their kindly glimmer. The dawn was breaking as he neared the steep English cliffs; but it was not the rosy dawn that he had seen so short a time before. The whole land was gray and misty and cold, and a feeling of despair took possession of the poor little bird's heart. Swifter and swifter now he flies across towns and forests and fields, till the house with the little white bedroom is once more in sight. In through the window he darts, but even as he pauses, weary and dazed, the pink feather falls from his head, and he is once more flying across the fan in the blue sky with the pink almond blossoms round him.

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"How tired the stork looks this morning!" said a boy's voice. "And oh, look, Dorothy! here is a little pink feather on your bed!"

"Ah, it must have been left by the angel with the pink wings who came and leant over my bed last night," said the little girl.

"Nonsense, Dorothy! You are always dreaming some rubbish."

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I have never seen the little Japanese child again. Did she think the stork cruel and unfaithful to her, or did she think she had dreamed of him?

Well, perhaps the whole story is a dream! Who shall say?

MRS. OSCAR WILDE.